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Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

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Summary

The current state of the governance arrangements for England is a significant and pressing problem that has been neglected by successive Governments for too long. There is an urgent need for significant reform to the way that England is governed. It is important that governance arrangements are established that not only work effectively, but that can be seen to work effectively, in order to strengthen and restore public trust in the functioning of our democracy at all levels.

While our evidence demonstrated that, given the opportunity, there are local leaders throughout England who are willing and able to successfully deliver for their areas, there are serious problems with the current arrangements that prevent the effective delivery of policies and services that are desperately needed in local areas across England. We identified six main areas of concern:

- (1) The current governance structures in England are far too complex, with 333 local authorities split between two-tier (county and district) and unitary authorities, with some areas (9,000–10,000) having additional town and parish councils. Some areas are also now covered by an intermediate level of government such as a combined authority or the Greater London Authority. In addition to this, there are also national bodies and agencies that intersect with service delivery at the various levels.
- (2) The complexity of the governance arrangements in England has created a patchwork structure that is a confusing and opaque system that people simply do not understand. It is not clear to people where decisions are made, where accountability lies, and, consequently, how policies and services can be adapted to the needs of local areas and local people.
- (3) The governance arrangements for England (and the United Kingdom as a whole) are some of the most centralised among democratic countries in the world. The key question this raises is whether decisions are being made in the right place to provide effective government for the people of England. The evidence we received clearly demonstrated that, both practically and democratically, the overly centralised governance arrangements in England are problematic. The balance of decisions is weighted too much to the centre and this leads to suboptimal decisions being made. We found that the dominant reason for continued overcentralisation is a prevalent culture in Whitehall that is unwilling to let go of its existing levers of power.
- (4) The current funding arrangements for local government and combined authorities are ineffective. One of the main levers of power used by central government over local counterparts is control of the purse strings. In particular, we found that the ubiquitous process of bidding for pots of money should be ended as it is wasteful of precious local resources that could be utilised more effectively.
- (5) There is significant geographical inequality in England, with some areas being considerably worse off than others in terms of investment and opportunities.

This is a concern that the Government clearly identified and prioritised in its focus on ‘levelling up’. Our evidence suggested that, in order to properly address this inequality, there needs to be a shift in the Government’s approach away from the current focus on metropolitan areas towards better considering how rural and coastal areas can be given equal opportunities.

- (6) People in England have a low sense of political efficacy, meaning that they do not feel political and social change is possible, and in particular they feel that their participation in the political process is unlikely to bring about change. The fact that people in England increasingly feel that their voice is not being heard is a serious concern. This must be heeded as a warning sign for the health of democracy in the United Kingdom.

While the devolution arrangements for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales first introduced in 1998 now mean that whole areas of policy in those nations primarily rest with the devolved institutions, there has been no corresponding change for England. This means that the UK Government has retained the role of governing in these policy areas of England alongside their role in governing for the whole of the UK. There is now a legitimate degree of uncertainty about how England fits into the UK’s constitutional arrangements. The introduction of devolution to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales fundamentally altered the UK’s constitutional arrangements, and while the effects of this for England have been less immediate, the more the institutions in devolved nations have become an established part of the UK’s constitutional architecture, the more awkward and potentially problematic the position of England becomes.

It is possible that a future general election could return a party with a majority in the House of Commons which does not have a majority of English seats. This raised the question of a UK Government passing legislation for England without the support of the majority of its parliamentary representatives (an issue commonly known as the ‘West Lothian question’). The English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) procedure, introduced in 2015 to address this issue, has now been repealed. We suspect that the removal of EVEL will go as unnoticed as the procedure itself during its lifetime, and while we support the removal of the EVEL procedure, we lament the symbolism that underlies its removal. While the Government’s position of ignoring the West Lothian question may be sustainable for so long as the current parliamentary arithmetic holds, this is not a long-term solution. It is not inconceivable that a future general election might render the West Lothian question one that cannot be ignored and doing nothing in the meantime solely on the basis of the current parliamentary composition risks being viewed as constitutionally negligent.

The second related question is how distinct English interests are represented within the UK Government. England is the only part of the United Kingdom that is now solely governed by the UK Government, with UK Ministers covering policy for both England and for the UK as a whole. This situation gives rise to two contradictory perceptual issues: first, that the UK Government is perceived as essentially being the Government of England, and acting in English interests first and foremost; and second, that the UK Government is set up to govern for the whole of the UK and so is not set up to appropriately ascertain and act on the distinct interests of England, or different parts of England, as opposed to the UK as a whole. There are difficulties inherent with UK

Ministers simultaneously being ‘Ministers for England’ when discharging their duties. It is entirely possible that a situation could arise where the interests of England and the UK diverge, and it is not clear how a Minister would or indeed should manage such a conflict of interest. We have called for the policy on this to be set out clearly in the interests of transparency. Ultimately, it is clear to the Committee that the question of England cannot continue to be ignored and so we call on the government to bring forward proposals for how the distinct interests of England can be effectively represented in the legislative process and within UK Government and UK Civil Service structures.

Given the urgent and pressing need for reform of the United Kingdom’s governance arrangements, we also considered what the obstacles to such reform has been. We found that while there was overwhelming support for reform, there was less agreement on what that reform should be. We identified three main interconnected reasons why reform of the governance arrangements for England has proven so difficult in the past:

- (1) There has been an absence of a vision for the future governance of England; instead, there has been almost permanent administrative reconfiguration, with new policies changing with each new government. Our evidence suggests that, ultimately, if reform is to be meaningful and successful, there needs to be a singular, agreed-upon vision for the direction that future governance arrangements should follow.
- (2) The two main political parties in the United Kingdom have historically held divergent views on this matter, with the Conservative Party viewing England as a whole and the Labour Party being more ready to think regionally about England. It should also be noted, however, that we also heard that there has often been division within political parties about how to move forward.
- (3) There has been a lack of agreement concerning how England should be subdivided in any potential governance reform programme, with the often-competing considerations of functional areas versus concepts of historically, culturally, and geographically bounded areas making it difficult to reach any sort of consensus when previous proposals have come forward.

If meaningful reform is to take place, it must address all these issues, which have previously acted as impediments to wholesale reform, otherwise the unsatisfactory pattern of short-term and partial measures will continue.

The Government’s Levelling Up White Paper should be commended for its willingness to openly identify many of the problems we have identified, and the publication of the White Paper has helped push the issue up the political agenda and into the public consciousness. The proposals in the White Paper are, however, not sufficient to address the problems with the current state of England’s governance arrangements. There are no easy answers to what models of reform would be successful or would satisfactorily address the issues that we have touched upon in this report. While there is unanimous agreement on this Committee that real, meaningful, and urgent changes need to be made, there is a range of different views about what these changes could or should be. Successive governments have tinkered on the edges of these questions and problems, and unfortunately, we feel the Levelling Up White Paper is destined to continue that pattern.

A different approach is needed in order to deliver meaningful, long-term reform of the governance of England. We have taken the unusual step of making a recommendation not only to the Government, but also to the Opposition and other parties in House of Commons: The Government should bring forward, and the opposition parties should support, the establishment of a Bill to create a cross-party Commission on the future governance of England that is funded by and responsible to Parliament. The Commission should have the remit to draw up proposals for reforming the governance arrangements for England, addressing the questions of England's place in the Union, and proposing legislation to implement these proposals.

1 Introduction

1. In 2018, our predecessor Committee set out that the devolution arrangements in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales had become “an established and significant feature of the UK constitutional architecture”.¹ That Committee went on to note that in the context of this:

the question of England’s place in the constitution needs urgently to be addressed. A failure to do so risks a sense of increasing disconnection of the English people from the political system. As part of the Government’s devolution policy, there must be a clear statement of how the different parts of England are fairly and effectively being represented. Consideration should be given to extending the existing decentralisation of powers and funding to combined authorities and mayors to a greater number of areas.²

2. In response, the Government at that time made clear they would not act in response to the Committee’s recommendation, but felt that:

Through the introduction of a parliamentary process which provides English MPs a stronger voice with regards to policy that applies only to England and the devolution of a significant range of powers to Mayors and combined authorities, the interests of England are better represented than ever before.³

3. Ahead of the 2019 General Election, the Conservative Party manifesto set out a commitment to introduce “full devolution across England”.⁴ Following that election, in line with its manifesto commitment to “publish an English Devolution White Paper setting out our plans next year”, the Government set out its ambition to publish a White Paper on English Devolution in its first year in office.⁵ The Committee launched this inquiry in preparation for scrutinising the Government’s proposals. Eventually it was announced, on 6th May 2021, that the Government would be releasing a Levelling Up White Paper, rather than an English Devolution White Paper.⁶ Following the September 2021 reshuffle, the existing Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was reorganised into the new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), headed by a new Secretary of State, Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP. In addition to the responsibilities of the former MHCLG, the new Department also took over the responsibility for, amongst other things, policy relating to devolution, elections and the Union, which had previously sat in the Cabinet Office. DLUHC published the Levelling

1 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Eighth report of the 2017–19 session, [Devolution and Exiting the EU: reconciling differences and building strong relationships](#), HC1485, para 21

2 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Eighth report of the 2017–19 session, [Devolution and Exiting the EU: reconciling differences and building strong relationships](#), HC1485, para 91

3 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [Eighth Special Report of the 2017–19 session, Government Response to the Committee’s Eighth Report: Devolution and Exiting the EU: reconciling differences and building strong relationships](#), HC1574

4 Conservative Party, [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019](#)

5 Prime Minister’s Office, [Queen’s Speech December 2019 - background briefing notes](#), p109; MHCLG, [Annual Report on Devolution 2019–20](#), March 2021

6 PQ 6299 [Regional Planning and Development], 27 May 2021; Jessica Hill, [“Devolution reforms to be replaced by levelling up white paper”](#), Local Government Chronicle, 6 May 2021

Up White Paper on 2nd February 2022. Now that the Government has published the Levelling Up White Paper, the Committee has been able to consider the proposals therein when concluding its inquiry.

The Inquiry

4. This inquiry started with the purpose of looking at devolution within England, in the context of the evolution of devolution within the UK, but it quickly became clear that there was a need to look more broadly at the overall governance arrangements for England. The need for this is highlighted by the problematic nature of the use of the term “devolution” in the context of England. Within the United Kingdom’s constitutional arrangements, the term devolution has an established meaning attached to the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (‘the devolved nations’) created in 1998 and the subsequent way these institutions have developed.⁷ In the devolved nations, there is now a clear “intermediate” tier of devolved government, and a local government structure sitting beneath this tier. As will be highlighted in this report, despite the use of the term “devolution” by the Government and others in relation to England, no corresponding devolution has taken place within England, nor does it appear to be envisaged by the Levelling Up White Paper. When the Government has talked about its “devolution agenda” or “devolution deals”, these have been about decentralising functions, policy and operational delivery, and associated funding, from Whitehall to local government, rather than devolving whole areas of competency and block funding away from the UK Parliament and Government, as is the case with the devolved nations.⁸ To avoid confusion in this report, we retain the established meaning of devolution and as much as possible refer to what is currently taking place in England as “decentralisation”. In doing this, we do not preclude the possibility of some form of English devolution, but rather it allows this to be identified as something distinct from local government arrangements.

5. There are then two key contexts for this inquiry into the governance arrangements for England. The first is the devolution to the devolved nations and how the UK Government and Parliament carry out for England the functions performed by devolved institutions. The second is the current structures of local government in England. Included in the latter category are combined authorities, and while we remain open to the possibility that combined authorities could develop into a tier of devolved government, in their current form they are not able to carry out the functions or have the characteristics of devolved institutions in other parts of the UK.

7 The arrangements established in 1998 for each devolved nation were different and have subsequently developed. Scotland and Wales now both operate on the basis of that some areas of competency are reserved to the UK Parliament and all other competencies are devolved. Northern Ireland operates a slightly different model with matters (competencies) being transferred, reserved or excepted. For a fuller account of devolution in the UK see: Patrick Thomas, Graeme Cowie & Philp Larkin, ‘The Forward March Devolution Halted?’ in *Parliament and the Law 3rd Edition*, Ed. Alexander Horne, Louise Thompson and Ben Yong, (Oxford 2022), pp 349–374.

8 As Professor Colin Copus, De Montfort university, put it us “ England has been excluded from the devolution experienced by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and by contrast has received only decentralisation of functions, tasks and budgets”. Emeritus Professor Colin Copus (Professor at De Montfort University, Leicester) ([EDE0014](#))

Historical context

6. The UK has historically had strong local government. As the Levelling Up White Paper sets out, this reached its heyday in 19th century, and subsequently, during the 20th century, “the UK has become one of the most centralised countries in the OECD”.⁹ By the end of the 1960s, the dual questions of devolution and local government reform were also at the fore, with Royal Commissions on Local Government (Radcliffe-Maud) and the Constitution (Kilbrandon) launched. The Radcliffe-Maud Commission reported in 1969 and proposed a comprehensive plan for restructuring local government in England and Wales that addressed questions of functions, finance, and effectiveness, as well as the question of local government areas. However, a change of government meant that most of the proposals put forward by the commission were abandoned. The Kilbrandon Commission reported in 1973 and recommended the establishment of devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales. These recommendations eventually led to referenda being held in 1979, but the required thresholds were not reached to establish the devolved assemblies.¹⁰ When it came to the question of England, the Kilbrandon Commission rejected devolution to both England as a whole and to any English region. It concluded that there was no “federal scheme satisfactorily tailored to fit the circumstances of England”.¹¹

7. Instead of implementing the recommendations of the Radcliffe-Maud Commission, the new Conservative Government brought about a significant restructuring of local government through the Local Government Act 1972, creating a uniform two-tier structure across England, Wales and Scotland.¹² A further significant change was made in 1986 when the Greater London Council and six metropolitan county councils were abolished, in line with the proposals made in the 1984 ‘Streamlining the Cities’ White Paper. In 1992, the Local Government Commission was established to review all local authorities in England, in five groups, to establish whether ‘structural change’ (i.e. a move to a unitary structure) was desirable. The initial recommendations of the commission supported unitary status in most areas. However, following a judicial review, the number of proposed unitary authorities was scaled back from the commission’s final recommendations. In the end, 46 new unitary authorities were created in England in 1994. While unitisation for the whole of England did not occur, unitary authorities were established for the whole of Scotland and Wales in the same year.

8. Devolution came back on the agenda with the election of the Labour Government in 1997. The result of this was a series of referenda in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on the question of establishing devolved institutions. At this time, there was also a referendum on creating the Greater London Authority and a Mayor of London. However, the Labour Government’s agenda for establishing devolution for regions of England was slower to develop, and was ultimately halted by the results of the referendum in the North East of England in 2004, with voters deciding against the establishment of a North East Assembly.

9 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p136

10 Royal Commission on the Constitution, Report, Cm. 5460, October 1973; In the Scottish referendum 51.6% voted in favour of the creation of a Scottish Assembly, on a turnout of 63.7%. However, this failed to meet the requirement in the legislation for 40% of total electorate to be in favour, as this only represented 32.9% of the electorate. The 1978 referendum in Wales provided a more definitive result. 79.74% of those who voted, voted against the creation of a Welsh Assembly, on a turnout of 59.01%.

11 Royal Commission on the Constitution, Report, Cm. 5460, October 1973

12 excluding three Scottish island authorities

9. While the idea of establishing devolved institutions for England was abandoned at that point, the regional approach to local government continued throughout the Labour Government (1997–2010). Regional Development Agencies were established in 1998, and regional economic and spatial strategies were introduced. With the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 the regional approach came to an end, with the strategies being revoked and Regional Development Agencies abolished.

10. Under the Coalition Government (2010–2015), and subsequent Conservative Governments (2015–), a deal to establish a Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Mayor was agreed, and then quickly followed by further deals. The first nine combined authorities were established under the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. Each Combined Authority has been established following negotiations between local and central government, resulting in each authority having a different range of powers.

2 The current state of the governance of England

11. Throughout the course of this inquiry, the Committee heard a range of views on the current state of the governance arrangements in England. While the focus of this chapter will be on the considerable areas and issues of concern, we think it is important to start with one of the positive aspects that we found in our inquiry, namely the people involved at all levels of government across England. The Committee received numerous detailed and considered written submissions to our inquiry, and we also saw local leaders representing districts, counties, unitary authorities, and combined authorities, from urban and rural areas across England, with clear dedication and commitment. The evidence we received showed a strong desire to make government work for local people and local areas. It also demonstrated that, given the opportunity, there are local leaders willing and able to successfully deliver for their areas.

12. What also became evident in this inquiry, however, is that there are a range of issues and concerns that may be preventing local leaders from delivering the policies and actions that their areas need. These concerns are grouped below under the following categories:

- The complexity of the current governance structures in England;
- The opaque nature of the governance arrangements;
- The centralised nature of the governance of England;
- ineffective funding arrangements;
- geographical inequality; and
- low political efficacy in England.

13. This chapter briefly sets out the current governance structures in England, before considering the issues and concerns under these headings. Having considered these categories, the report will later consider whether, and to what extent, the Government's Levelling Up White Paper deals with these issues and concerns.

The current governance structures of England

14. As set out above, the systems of local government in each part of the UK have developed separately, though often in parallel. In England, areas are now either still covered by the two-tier county council (upper tier) and district council (lower tier) system established in 1972, or are unitary authorities. The two tiers have distinct functions, though they overlap in some matters, whereas unitary authorities carry out all local government functions within the relevant area. There are 333 local authorities in England, of which 24 are two-tier (24 county councils, 181 district councils), and 128 are single-tier 'unitary' authorities (Unitary Authorities 58, Metropolitan districts 36, London boroughs 32, City of London

1, Isles of Scilly 1).¹³ Additionally, in some parts of England, there is a further tier of parish and town councils, of which there are between 9,000–10,000.¹⁴ Parish and town councils exist in both two-tier and unitary authorities.

15. On top of this, some areas of England have an addition ‘intermediate’ layer of governance. For example, across England, there is, on top of these layers, the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority (GLA), nine Combined Authorities (CA) with a Mayor,¹⁵ with a further two mayoral Combined Authorities announced and in the process of being established,¹⁶ one Combined Authority without a Mayor,¹⁷ and Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (which, while not a Combined Authority, does have a bespoke “devolution deal”). All of the authorities in this “intermediate tier” of Government have a different range of powers and responsibilities from each other.

16. Further, there are a number of national organisations that deliver public services or control funding across England that bisect all of these governance structures. These range from the NHS, welfare and employments services, to the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Homes and Communities Agency, Highways England, and the Arts Council. These bodies are accountable to central government but will necessarily have relationships with and significant interaction with local government structures at all levels.

17. Finally, all parts of England are now covered by at least one Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and 37 areas are covered by two. These LEPs were voluntary bodies established in 2010–11 to coordinate economic activity as part of the Coalition Government’s ‘Big Society’ initiative. They have working relationships with local authorities and combined authorities, but are not accountable to local authorities.

18. Above all of this sits the UK Parliament and the UK Government, which make the laws, control funding, and set national policy for England in the areas in which the devolved nations have competence, as well as those areas which are for the whole of the UK.

Complexity

19. As even this brief exposition of the current governance structures shows, these arrangements are complex, overlapping, and different throughout England. This point was clearly made to the Committee by Councillor Martin Tett, Leader of Buckinghamshire Council, when he told us that the governance arrangements in England are “confusing and potentially dysfunctional” due to the fact that:

You have so many different types of authority within England. You have counties, county unitaries, districts, unitary districts, combined authorities,

13 Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities, [Guidance Local government structure and elections](#), 9 October 2021

14 DLUHC says there are around 9000, and the National Association of Local Councils says there are around 10,000. Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities, [Guidance Local government structure and elections](#), 9 October 2021; National Association of Local Councils, [About Local Councils](#), Webpage

15 Greater Manchester, Sheffield City Region, West Yorkshire, Cornwall, North of Tyne, Tees Valley, West Midlands, Liverpool City Region, Cambridgeshire / Peterborough, West of England, Greater Lincolnshire.

16 York and North Yorkshire, East Midlands

17 North East

metro Mayors, metropolitan authorities. It is a pretty bewildering array, quite frankly, and very different from what you have for example in Scotland and Wales, where there is a lot more structure historically.¹⁸

20. This view of the governance arrangements was shared by other local government leaders, for example Councillor John Fuller, Chair of the District Councils' Network and leader of South Norfolk District Council, described the arrangements as a "complex landscape", that is a "cat's cradle of different tiers".¹⁹ Alderman Roy Perry, Chair of South East Councils, described the arrangements as a "total mess" and "a complex situation" that "at the present time... is not serving the people of this country well".²⁰

21. A similar picture was painted by combined authority mayors. Tracy Brabin, Mayor of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, told us that the current arrangements are "very complex".²¹ Rt. Hon. Andy Burnham, Mayor of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, described the governance arrangements as "patchy", but talking in particular about the introduction of combined authorities, he said they were a "work in progress", and that this was a positive move "towards a healthier set of governance arrangements for England".²² This positive view of the role of mayoral combined authorities was shared by Ben Houchen, Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, who described them as being a "decent start". Mr Houchen did nevertheless caution that if the mayoral combined authority model is not rolled out across the whole England then it would become "more of a patchwork of a governance model that is more difficult".²³

22. Jamie Driscoll, Mayor of the North of Tyne Combined Authority, highlighted another area of complexity we found in the current arrangements for England, namely national agencies which deliver public services that interact with the functions of local government, but are only accountable to central government. He argued that the current governance arrangements which deal with the complex problems of government are "fragmented", "slow" and "produce suboptimal outcomes".²⁴ Illustrating this point, Mr Driscoll noted that "Homes England is not integrated with the people who run the planning system. Highways England is not integrated with the transport authorities. Sport England is not integrated with public health".²⁵

23. A similar picture of English governance arrangements was set out to us by academic experts. Professor Michael Kenny, University of Cambridge, told us that local authority structures "sit quite awkwardly alongside some mismatching bodies with overseeing policing, health and other public service powers, and in some places an increasingly complicated layering of different tiers of authority".²⁶ Dr Arianna Giovannini, De Montfort University, told us that the recent addition of "devolution deals" had created "a patchwork of ad hoc fixes that do not cover the whole country and vary considerably in terms of power, resources, responsibilities that are passed down to local and combined authorities".²⁷ Professor Richard Wyn Jones, Cardiff University, told us that the

18 [Q34](#)
 19 [Q35](#)
 20 [Q35](#)
 21 [Q54](#)
 22 [Q2](#)
 23 [Q52](#)
 24 [Q5](#)
 25 [Q5](#)
 26 [Q2](#)
 27 [Q2](#)

governance arrangements for England are “deeply confusing”, adding that the system of English local government is “known to be very weak”, and the intermediate “devolved” level of government is “incoherent”, “confused” and that “there is no underpinning basic consensus as to what that level is meant to be achieving”.²⁸

24. The complex and fragmented state of the governance arrangements for England is also recognised by the UK Government. The Levelling Up White Paper set out that:

At present, there is a patchwork of local administrative bodies across the UK, which often overlap and are complicated to navigate. This can inhibit the cultivation of local capacity and leadership.

In England, local governance is split across county councils, district councils, unitary authorities and London borough councils and, at the sub-regional level, mayoral and non-mayoral combined authorities and the Greater London Authority (GLA). Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Pan-Regional Partnerships (PRPs) also have some responsibilities for economic strategy. Subnational Transport Bodies (STBs) develop regional transport strategies. These are often overlaid with divergent geographical boundaries for public service delivery, such as police and health. The result is fragmentation and administrative complexity.²⁹

25. When the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, was asked how he would describe the current state of the governance of England, he told us it was “complicated”. He went on to further explain:

The key thing is, without wanting to go off on too long an historical canter, there is a continuity and a history in the governing arrangements of England and the whole of the United Kingdom. Because of the length and durability of particular institutions, we are not like other countries. I am not suggesting we are better but it is the case that the French system of Département and the German system of Länder are relatively recent innovations compared with the history of English counties, for example. Because of the nature of history but also the different appetites for different types of governance across England, you will be unlikely to have an absolutely perfect uniform picture. We are, I hope, evolving and devolving at the same time.³⁰

Opaqueness

26. The related concern to the complexity of the governance arrangement in England is that these complicated, patchwork structures have created a confusing and opaque system that people simply do not understand.

27. Professor Kenny explained that for him the complicated layering of different tiers of authorities and how they awkwardly sit alongside health and public service bodies means that “the governance of England is increasingly opaque from most citizens’ perspective”.³¹ Similarly, Professor Wyn Jones said that the current arrangements for the governance of

28 [Q2](#)

29 DLUHC, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), 2.3.3

30 [Q97](#)

31 [Q2](#)

England are difficult enough for “so called experts to follow” and that for citizens they are “very, very difficult to understand”.³² The same message was given to us by representatives of local government. For example, Alderman Perry told us that the current governance structures are “confusing to the people who work in them, and [...] totally confusing to the general population.”³³ Councillor David Williams, the County Councils Network Chairman and Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, told us:

In terms of residents understanding where decisions are made, when it comes to things like skills, public transport, and bus franchising I do not think it is clear that those decisions are actually made centrally and not made locally. In two-tier areas, you have a particular lack of understanding in terms of whether lower-tier councils are responsible for various decisions or upper tier councils have responsibility. Then we have this unique situation of the people services we deliver—I am thinking particularly about adult social care and children’s services. Really only those people who are accessing those services get to understand where those decisions are being taken.³⁴

28. More generally, there is clearly a problem of the public understanding at what level powers and responsibilities for particular policies or actions rest. Councillor Sir Richard Leese, Chair of the Local Government Association’s City Regions Board and Leader of Manchester City Council, told us that “local people [think] that the council is responsible for everything and that we have quite dictatorial powers in order to do things, as well. My perception is that there is a mismatch between what people believe and the actuality of where power lies”.³⁵ Andy Burnham also expressed concern that there was a mismatch in the powers that mayors had and what the public thought they could do. He told the Committee:

There are many problems in terms of the public’s expectations of what we can do and what Jamie [Driscoll] and I and other Mayors can actually do. There is possibly a feeling that we have more powers than the ones we have and, if we are not careful, that can create a problem for this embryonic English devolution, in that the public will misunderstand the range of powers at our disposal and become disillusioned with devolution if we cannot do more.³⁶

29. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), raising similar concerns, offered us a different perspective on this issue. The legislation setting up the LGSCO dates to 1974 and has not kept pace with many of the changes to the local government landscape. In particular, the introduction of combined authorities has further complicated the issue of when complaints can be referred to them. As they set out in their evidence, “successive reforms and devolution have resulted in a fragmented and sometimes opaque system”.³⁷ LGSCO highlight that with some of these changes it is not always clear to them when an issue can be brought to them. The real concern they raise however is that these “ambiguities and uncertainties” may result in “confusion and uncertainty [that] may dissuade and frustrate citizens seeking redress”.³⁸

32 [Q2](#)

33 [Q35](#)

34 [Q65](#)

35 [Q67](#)

36 [Q3](#)

37 LGSCO ([EDE0022](#))

38 LGSCO ([EDE0022](#))

30. **The Committee has significant concerns about current governance arrangements for England. The evidence we received suggests that even those working within the different parts of local government are not always clear on how the system works, where decisions are made, where accountability lies, and consequently how policies and services can be adapted to the needs of local areas and local people. If the people within government are unsure at times where powers and responsibility, and hence accountability, rest, this lack of clarity is magnified for individuals who have little knowledge or experience of the structures. This has the potential to leave individuals less likely to be able to access what they need from government, leaving them often unable to know who is responsible, and as a result are not properly able to hold their democratic representatives to account.**

Centralisation

31. It is generally agreed that the UK has one of the most centralised systems of governance among democratic countries in the world, and that following devolution in 1998, the arrangements in England have become even more centralised.³⁹ The Government make this point clear in their own Levelling Up White Paper.⁴⁰ In and of itself, having a centralised system of government is neither a good nor a bad thing. The question is how effectively the system of government operates for its people. The concern with the centralised nature of the governance arrangements in England are that they are not working effectively for the people of England in particular, nor are they working effectively for people in the UK more widely. Professor Mike Kenny summed up this issue when he told us that the governance arrangements for England are:

...highly centralised in character, in that it is one of the most centralised large democracies in the developed world, with a state that is still making decisions and developing policies for many different places, of some of which it has little understanding.⁴¹

32. This gets to the heart of the concerns we've found in our inquiry, namely whether decisions are being made in the right place. The clear message we received on this question was that, as Councillor David Williams put it, "too many decisions are taken centrally, and a lot more could be taken locally".⁴² The issue, Councillor Sir Richard Leese told us, was that decisions can be taken at a number of levels, and currently the balance between where decisions are being taken is a concern. His assessment of the current arrangements was that:

Far too many of the decisions are made in a relatively fragmented way in Whitehall... Not enough of the decisions are made locally, not enough of them are made in partnership and not enough of them are made in a joined-up way. The objective we want to pursue is not that everything should go to a local level; it is about making decisions at the right level.⁴³

39 South East England Councils ([EDE0046](#)); Dr Luke Cooper ([EDE0037](#)); Buckinghamshire Growth Board ([EDE0038](#)); Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([EDE0039](#)); Centre for Governance and Scrutiny ([EDE0044](#)); Professor John Denham (Director, Centre for English Identity and Politics at University of Southampton) ([EDE0026](#))

40 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p136

41 [Q2](#)

42 [Q65](#)

43 [Q63](#)

33. The problem with the number and types of decisions that are being made centrally in Whitehall is that it appears from our evidence that they are being made without knowledge or a full appreciation of local areas, different needs and different circumstances. For example, Alderman Roy Perry told us that he would get concerned when civil servants from Whitehall would come down to tell local people what was happening in their own area.⁴⁴ Similarly, Councillor Martin Tett told us that while the civil servants in Whitehall wanted to understand local areas, they invariably do not succeed in doing so. In large part, he attributed this to a ‘silo’ culture within Whitehall that means that each department focuses on trying to “beam [a] policy down to a local level”.⁴⁵ In his view, what they are missing is a “place based”, “holistic” approach, which understands the different elements that need to be pulled together to deliver policy objectives.⁴⁶ Councillor Tett further told us that, in his view, part of the problem has how Whitehall viewed local government, which is “as their delivery arm, rather than a partner”.⁴⁷

34. This over-centralisation and the tendency in Whitehall to hold on to power was something that all four combined authority mayors we heard from also identified. For example, Andy Burnham provided a similar assessment to Councillor Tett. Drawing on his own experience of Westminster, he told us he had seen a growing distrust of local government from successive Governments, starting in 1980s, and that this tendency to “centralise and control” carried through into the Labour Governments between 1997 and 2010, in which he was a Minister (2006–2010). The idea seems to have emerged in this period that if something was going to be delivered, it had to be done through top-down targets imposed across the board due to the prevailing view that people out in the system on the ground could not be trusted. In Mr Burnham’s view, this has become “baked into Whitehall culture”.⁴⁸ Mr Burnham also stressed the problem of “the policy-specific silo approach of the way to organise government”.⁴⁹ He explained that this silo culture led to people in Whitehall working within narrow parameters on their own internal targets, and the result of this is that “no one takes responsibility for of the whole child or the whole community”.⁵⁰ It is this ability for local government to be able to make decisions that bring together different stands of government, and to tailor and address policy to local needs that was consistently put to us as the primary justification for the argument that England should move away from the current overly centralised system.

35. Ben Houchen told us that it should not come as a revelation to anyone that the “centre is always reluctant to pass power from the centre”.⁵¹ However, he added a note of caution, telling us that many authorities are not ready for large numbers of powers to be given to them. He was clear for example that “if the Government were to just dump every single power on the Tees Valley tomorrow, the system would fall over”.⁵² The argument Mr Houchen put to us was that, rather than simply moving powers out of Whitehall because

44 [Q37](#)

45 [Q37](#)

46 [Q37](#)

47 [Q34](#)

48 [Q13](#)

49 [Q12](#)

50 [Q12](#)

51 [Q67](#)

52 [Q67](#)

there is a recognition that the current system is over-centralised, it is important that areas build up capacity and expertise that prove the readiness to take on the powers, to have what he called “earned autonomy”.⁵³

36. Both Professor John Denham, Southampton University, and Lord Heseltine, drawing upon their past experience in Government, set out their views on the primary reasons why Whitehall continues to hold on to power. For Lord Heseltine, the main reason why reform of Whitehall to deal with the issues of over-centralisation has not taken place was the self-interest of Ministers and Whitehall officials. He explained:

Turkeys don't vote for Christmas. Everybody is clinging on to the past structure that suits their careers, their experience and their way of working, and there simply is no will...

...The problem is that [Whitehall] is divided into baronies of power: the Ministers' careers go up the baronies, the civil servants live within the baronies, and the Treasury gives money to the baronies. It is not surprising that people cling on to that model of decision making. The fact that it is completely irrelevant to the unity of the individual economies that it is meant to be dealing with is very secondary to people who are faced with the thought that if they change it, it is their careers and pattern of work that will be undermined.⁵⁴

37. Professor Denham agreed with Lord Heseltine that self-interest is an important factor, but highlighted two other habits in central government that help to explain this pattern. The first is an assumption that “the local probably cannot manage” and so if something needs to be done there is a tendency to think ‘it will be better if we do it ourselves’; and the second is that:

the centre does not now know how to deal with alternative centres of power... Whitehall does not really know how to deal with people who legitimately have power in their own right—they have the same problem with the devolved nations, by the way.⁵⁵

38. Professor Denham also identified another problematic aspect of the current centralised nature of governance in England when he argued that Government and Whitehall “are really not very accountable at that national level”.⁵⁶ The issue here is that even if Whitehall were able to adapt and implement policies according to the variety of different local needs and contexts, central government is accountable only to Parliament and in particular the elected Members of the House of Commons. The time and resources available to MPs is simply not sufficient to properly scrutinise and hold to account at the appropriate level. For example, there 553 MPs in the House of Commons representing constituencies in England. If every English MP were to scrutinise how a new policy and its implementation was adapted to their constituency for just five minutes on the floor of the House, this would take a total of 2,760 minutes, or 46 Hours, or 4.6 days if the House sat for 10 hour sessions each day.⁵⁷ Even if only half of English MPs were to carry out scrutiny and for

53 [Q67, Q75](#)

54 [Q101](#)

55 [Q102](#)

56 [Q100](#)

57 These figures assume the Minister is also an English MP and will not question themselves.

only one minute each, this would still take 276 minutes or 4 hours 36 minutes, for just one policy. Across all government departments and polices, it is simply not possible for the House of Commons to hold central government to account sufficiently to ensure that all these policies are adapted and delivered appropriately to all parts of England. There is no other democratic body capable of holding central government to account, and so government potentially becomes more and more unaccountable for its actions at a local level.

39. The evidence is clear both practically and democratically that the overly centralised arrangements of government in England are problematic. We were convinced by the evidence presented to us that the current balance of decisions is weighted too much to the centre and that this leads to suboptimal decision-making and policies, with corresponding challenges for delivery. It was suggested to us that the predominant reason for the over-centralisation of power is due to the culture in Whitehall that is unwilling to let go of powers. There is also concern about what was described as the ‘silo culture’ of Whitehall departments. While this may have benefits in Whitehall for developing national policies for the whole of England or the UK, it is clear that when these policies are implemented locally there is a risk that they will not connect and so local areas and people may have a range of different, disjointed experiences. Local government is not simply a delivery arm for Whitehall, and should not be treated thus. There is a clear role for local government to help bring together national policies and adapt them for implementation in local areas. In order for this to happen, there will need to be a culture shift in central government, to view local government as partners. It is important that this rebalancing of power take place urgently, for as it currently stands, central government wields too much power, and the UK Parliament is not set up to scrutinise this use of power either effectively or appropriately. Taken together, all of these factors may lead to poorer outcomes for individuals across England, which cannot be tolerated.

Funding

40. One of the key levers of power that central government has over local government under the current arrangements is control over the purse strings. We heard that the current arrangements were deeply problematic and that there were repeated calls for long term funding, an end to the ubiquitous practice of bidding, and the ability to raise local taxes to allow greater local control over how money is spent. For example, Andy Burnham told us that “the funding of local government is a problem. It is an obstacle. It is holding back the progress of devolution. The culture of bidding is a problem... It is wasteful of everyone’s time, of everyone’s energy”.⁵⁸

41. Tracy Brabin told us the current system of bidding for pots of money was like a “beauty contest” and that this system takes away a lot of person power, money and energy from local government, often only for pitches to be discarded or put on a shelf.⁵⁹ She told us that, “if we could get away from that template where we are bidding against each other

58 [Q4](#)

59 [Q54](#), [Q86](#)

and have that devolved budget or those powers to raise money across our region, it would be helpful”.⁶⁰ This call for long term funding was echoed by Ben Houchen and Jamie Driscoll.⁶¹

42. The same concerns were raised with us by leaders of local authorities. For example, Alderman Roy Perry told us that:

[t]he situation we experience now of areas having to bid for money and dance to the tune of Ministers and civil servants who are going to hand it out is not devolution at all. That is increasing central control and the ability of the centre to dictate what happens locally.⁶²

43. Reflecting what we heard throughout our evidence, Councillor Julian German, Leader of Cornwall Council, explained:

One of the big challenges for local government...is around the many different funding streams and having to continually bid in, quite often for reasonably small amounts of money. We are expending time and effort on that—sometimes it has been successful, sometimes not—whereas if things like the UK shared prosperity fund was a seven or 10-year programme, we’d know what our resources were, and we could get on and deliver for local residents rather than working hand to mouth, not knowing whether we can actually carry on a project into future years.

44. This was echoed by Councillor Martin Tett, who stated that in addition to long-term, sustainable funding for local government, this would “give far more autonomy to local government in terms of the ability to drive and maintain its own funding base”.⁶³

45. When the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, was asked if he accepted that the governance structures for the UK and in particular for England are overly centralised, and whether he thought that there was room for further devolution and responsibilities beyond what has already been granted, he simply told us “yes”.⁶⁴ When further asked whether he thought that local and ‘devolved’ government in England should have greater tax raising powers, he stated that there were:

Intense discussions with my Government colleagues about what we can do in the future. The point has been made very effectively by Ben Houchen that devolutionary control, or a greater level of control, over business rates, might be a good thing. I think he has made a very good argument but I must not get ahead of myself in committing the Government to a particular outcome. It is a direction of travel that is right and the case you make is powerful.⁶⁵

46. When pressed for details of how the Government is considering reforming local government finance, Michael Gove told us that “[b]y definition, all Finance Ministries guard control over tax-raising powers and policies very jealously. If I may, I might come

60 [Q54](#)

61 [Q5](#); [68](#)

62 [Q39](#)

63 [Q41](#)

64 [Q109](#), [Q111](#)

65 [Q112](#)

back to the Committee in due course and say a bit more about our emerging thinking on this”.⁶⁶ Since the Secretary of State appeared before the Committee on 1st March 2022, no further information has been provided to the Committee on this point.

47. It is clear from our evidence that the current funding structures for local government and combined authorities reflect the instinct in Whitehall to maintain control of the levers of power and the purse strings. It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to make detailed recommendations on reforms to the funding structures for local government and combined authorities, however, it is clear to us that reforms are needed. In response to this report, the Government should make a clear commitment to put an end to the ubiquitous system of bidding for pots of money that appear to us to be wasteful of resources that could be deployed more effectively at all levels. In addition, the Government should provide the Committee with the information that the Secretary of State committed to provide to us in March of this year.

Geographical inequity

48. Another clearly identified concern with the current governance arrangements for England was that there is considerable geographical inequity in England. By this it is meant that different parts of England are significantly worse off than others. This is the issue at the heart of the Government’s commitment to ‘levelling up’. In the forward to the Levelling Up White Paper, the then Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP, set out this problem saying:

Because while we are without doubt one of the biggest and strongest economies in the world we are also one of the most unbalanced. A country in which the place of your birth is one of the clearest determining factors in how you’ll get on, what opportunities will be open to you, even the number of years for which you can expect to live. This is not a new observation. Politicians have been aware of this regional inequality for as long as it has existed, yet have been content to focus instead on the big picture of national growth—a waste of talent and a waste of this country’s economic potential.⁶⁷

49. The White Paper goes on to set out that “The UK has larger geographical differences than many other developed countries on multiple measures, including productivity, pay, educational attainment and health”.⁶⁸

50. Concern around geographical inequity was also raised in evidence we received to our inquiry. For example, Britain’s Leading Edge (a collaboration of 12 upper tier rural authorities without major cities) raised concerns that the focus of the Government’s current “devolution” approach (in 2021) focused investment on metropolitan areas, and had created a “policy corridor” in the centre of Great Britain that was excluding rural and coastal areas. They went on to set out their view that:

This limited approach to devolution risks exacerbating the geographical inequality that, unfortunately, still characterises the United Kingdom. While Britain is home to the richest regions in Europe, stark inequalities

66 [Q128](#)

67 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p xiv

68 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p xv

mean that the disparity in Britain between the richest and poorest is the biggest in Europe. It is overwhelmingly regions in Britain's Leading Edge that are being left behind.⁶⁹

51. Dr Ariana Giovannini, DeMontfort University, also raised a similar concern, stating that:

...devolution remains a disconnected project that benefits only some areas across England, with a tendency of privileging metropolitan ones and excluding rural and coastal areas, and is still far from delivering any form of real empowerment and autonomy to all localities.

52. **It is widely recognised that there is considerable geographical inequity within the governance arrangements of England. This is the area that the Government have clearly identified and prioritised in producing the Levelling Up White Paper. We note, however, the concerns raised in our evidence that until now the Government's approach to "devolution" in England has focused on metropolitan areas, or areas in which there is a major city. Careful thought needs to be given to how the coastal and rural areas of England can be given equal opportunities to develop and grow.**

Low political efficacy

53. The Committee also heard concerns about the level of political efficacy for people in England identifying as English. Political efficacy is defined as the "feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change".⁷⁰ Professor Wyn Jones, talking about research he and others had carried out as part of the Future of England Survey, told us:

What I find most interesting about English attitudes specifically associated with feeling English is that there is a low sense of what political scientists call "political efficacy"—a sense that your voice matters, and that somebody cares about what you think. We find in England that people with a strong sense of English identity feel that the system does not listen to them and is not interested in their voice. This makes the English different from the Welsh. There is something interesting about this.⁷¹

54. He went on to say that what this means is that those who identify as English essentially feel that "[t]he state that was once mine is no longer mine. It is no longer interested in me. I have become alienated from it".⁷² This research was subsequently published and set out in more detail in the book *Englishness*. In it, Professor Wyn Jones and Professor Alisa Henderson find that "English identifiers are more likely to say that they are unable to make a difference and the state is uninterested in hearing their voice".⁷³ Further, their data shows that "English identity is related to a sense of dislocation and alienation that we simply do not see in Scotland and Wales."⁷⁴

69 Britain's Leading Edge ([EDE0033](#))

70 Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren Miller, *The voter decides*, 1954, p187

71 [Q33](#)

72 [Q33](#)

73 Alisa Henderson & Richard Wyn Jones, *Englishness: The Political Force transforming Britain*, 2021, p56

74 Alisa Henderson & Richard Wyn Jones, *Englishness: The Political Force transforming Britain*, 2021, p143

55. Drawing on the low levels of political efficacy they found in their 2019 polling, the Electoral Reform Society told us:

[T]his low sense of political efficacy and having one's voice matter should come as no surprise given the limited involvement of citizens directly in decisions affecting their lives which includes the issue of devolution in England. More transparency around devolution and citizens' direct involvement are necessary to properly reform devolution in England.⁷⁵

56. In discussing the low level of political efficacy found in Professor Wyn Jones' research, Professor Kenny highlighted the issue of how people feel towards the centre (i.e. central government based out of Westminster/Whitehall and London as an economic centre), he told the Committee:

In the last decade or more, many people in England have come to feel about the centre the way people in Scotland and Wales do. They have a feeling that it is somehow out there on its own and is disconnected in terms of its policy priorities.⁷⁶

57. The Electoral Reform Society also raised concerns about the low level of political efficacy telling us that only:

[T]wo percent of people felt they had a 'great deal of influence' over decision-making in the UK, with 80 percent of people feeling they have 'not very much' or 'no influence'.⁷⁷

58. The Government's own research also identifies that people across England have a low level of belief that they can influence things in their local area. When asked to what extent people agree that they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area, positive responses in every part of England were at 30 percent or lower, with the highest being in London at 30% and the lowest in the North East at 22%.⁷⁸

59. The problems and concerns we heard in written and oral evidence received in this inquiry on the current state of affairs are stark. The Secretary of State, while accepting that the current governance arrangements are "complicated", appealed to the importance of "continuity and a history in the governing arrangements of England and the whole of the United Kingdom" to explain the lack of progress in this area.⁷⁹ While the ability to reform and adapt, rather than simply rip up and replace, ancient structures and arrangements has been at the heart of the UK's unique constitutional success, as Edmund Burke set out:

A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve.⁸⁰

75 Electoral Reform Society ([EDE0034](#))

76 [Q36](#)

77 Electoral Reform Society ([EDE0034](#))

78 DLUHC, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), p85; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202021>

79 [Q97](#)

80 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the revolution in France*, 1790

60. **Successive Governments, far from putting in place careful reforms to nurture and develop decentralised and durable governance structures for England, have adopted a piecemeal and uncoordinated approach. This is simply not good enough.**

61. **The long-term viability of governance arrangements in England is a significant and pressing problem that has been neglected by successive governments for too long. It is clear that those in local government want a system that enables them to deliver for people and businesses in their area. However, the reality is that the governance arrangements for England are simply too complex, and too much is controlled from the centre. We heard that people in England have particularly low political efficacy, meaning they simply do not think that their voice will be heard or matters. This is a serious warning sign for the health of democracy in the United Kingdom.**

62. *There is an urgent and pressing need for significant reform of the governance arrangements of England, so that they not only work effectively, but can be seen to work effectively, in order to strengthen and restore the public trust in the functioning of our democracy at all levels.*

3 England in the UK Parliament and Government

63. The main focus of this report is the governance structures within England, but there are also important issues relating to the governance of England post-1998 UK devolution. The devolved arrangements for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales now place primary responsibility for whole areas of competence such as health, education and agriculture in the devolved institutions. There has, however, been no corresponding devolution for or within England. The UK Government and Parliament retain responsibility for the governance of all such policy areas in all regions of England, alongside for the UK as a whole in reserved areas. We heard evidence that this disparity is already causing some issues, which are only likely to develop if they are not addressed. Professor Kenny explained to us:

the governance of England is in some ways constitutionally increasingly problematic in a Union where devolution has developed for other parts of the kingdom, and by a process of subtraction the UK Government have in some key respects become England's Government. That, it seems to me, stretches or puts a strain on the British constitutional tradition.⁸¹

Professor Kenny continued in this vein, stating that it is not just a lack of constitutional vision for England, rather it is lack of constitutional vision for the whole United Kingdom, and how England fits into that wider set of changes brought about by the introduction of devolution in other parts of the UK, that is the root cause of such issues. England, he said, “has been very disconnected from the process”.⁸²

64. The questions of where England fits into the current constitutional arrangements post-devolution have to a large extent been unasked for most of the past 20+ years. However, as Professor Kenny points out, this position may become increasingly problematic. The question of where England fits is asked here in relation to both the UK Parliament and the UK Government.

England in Westminster

65. When our predecessor Committee raised the question of England's place in the UK constitutional arrangements following the introduction of devolution, the Government's response was that the introduction of the English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) parliamentary procedure provided “English MPs a stronger voice with regards to policy that applies only to England”.⁸³ EVEL was introduced in Standing Orders of the House of Commons in 2015, and created a stage of the legislative process that limited involvement to English MPs where matters related solely to England. The introduction of the EVEL procedure, as Professor Kenny explained, was commonly understood to have two primary purposes:

81 [Q2](#)

82 [Q4](#)

83 [Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Eighth Special Report of the 2017–19 session, Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report: Devolution and Exiting the EU: reconciling differences and building strong relationships, HC1574](#)

- The first technical purpose was to try and address the ‘West Lothian question’, where a Member or Members for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland could bring the deciding votes on an issue relating only to England in which the majority of England MPs vote the other way.
- The second purpose was, as Professor Kenny put it, to give “the English a distinctive voice within the system of parliamentary government. There was a hope, I think, that this would function as analogous to the legislative consent process in the devolved parliaments”.⁸⁴

66. As Dr Daniel Glover, of Queen Mary University of London, and Professor Kenny have set out, while EVEL may have addressed the first purpose, this was never tested given the make up of Parliaments since 2015. However, in regards the second purpose, they did not think it had worked at all, saying it “failed to provide opportunities for a distinctively English ‘voice’ to be expressed in Westminster”.⁸⁵ Similarly, Professor Denham told us he thought that “most people would agree that [EVEL] has not created any type of national forum for England”.⁸⁶ Professor Wyn Jones told us that whatever the rhetoric around the introduction of EVEL, it was “designed as a blocking mechanism. There is no genuine effort to create a locus in which and English voice or English voices could emerge.”⁸⁷ During the Covid-19 pandemic, the EVEL procedure was suspended, and subsequently it has now been abolished entirely.⁸⁸ One possible consequence of the removal of EVEL is that it is possible that at a future UK General Election there may be a UK Government responsible for England-only policy areas that lacks a majority among English MPs. The consequence of this, according to Dr Glover and Professor Kenny, could be to inflame tensions around the legitimacy of English governance and law making.⁸⁹

67. While the removal of the EVEL procedures may go as unnoticed as the procedures were, in practice, unknown among the general population (according to Professor Wyn Jones, only 2% of people knew about them), there is now no mechanism for representatives of England alone to decide on legislation that applies only in England, and neither is there a way in which a distinctive voice for England might be heard in its governance mechanisms.⁹⁰ We heard differing views on whether there needed to be a distinct or separate way for policy and legislation applying solely to England to be discussed and decided upon. For example, Lord Heseltine told us that, nevertheless, the “English voice is fairly loudly heard within the United Kingdom”.⁹¹ Andy Burnham told us that “the interests of England are well represented in Parliament, and some might say dominant in Parliament. From my perspective, I don’t think that is where the problem lies.”⁹² Professor Denham on the other hand told us that there need to be “a sense of England having a system of government” and that he would go further than EVEL and have English law-making that is democratic on an English level.⁹³

84 [Q45](#)

85 Dr Daniel Gover (Lecturer in British Politics at Queen Mary University of London); Professor Michael Kenny (Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at University of Cambridge) ([EDE0018](#))

86 [Q100](#)

87 [Q46](#)

88 Evidence taken before the Procedure Committee on 28 June 2011, HC 212, Q535

89 Dr Daniel Gover (Lecturer in British Politics at Queen Mary University of London); Professor Michael Kenny (Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at University of Cambridge) ([EDE0018](#))

90 [Q46](#)

91 [Q121](#)

92 [Q7](#)

93 [Q120](#)

68. When asked how the distinct interests of England should be represented in the UK Parliament now that EVEL has been abolished, the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, told the Committee:

I am a traditionalist in this respect. The majority of Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom Parliament are English Members. I know people say that English votes for English laws is an answer to the West Lothian question, but I take the view John Smith did, that the answer to the West Lothian question is to stop asking the question. The United Kingdom Parliament is an example of, and I am speaking as someone who is not English, a constitutional arrangement in which the gentleness, patience and tolerance of the English people is displayed to great effect in making sure the United Kingdom works successfully.⁹⁴

England in Whitehall

69. The second question of where England fits into the current constitutional arrangements is how its needs are accounted for and represented in Government. The issue here is that England is the only remaining part of the UK that is governed solely by the UK Government in all policy areas. This has been described as the ‘double hatted’ nature of Whitehall departments, being both Departments of State for the whole of the UK and also Departments for England as an individual unit within the UK. This situation potentially gives rise to two contradictory perceptual issues: first, that the UK Government is perceived as essentially being the Government of England, and acting in English interests first and foremost;⁹⁵ and second, that the UK Government is set up to govern for the whole of the UK and so is not set up to appropriately ascertain and act on the distinct interests of England, or different parts of England, as opposed to the UK as a whole. There is also the connected question of how the UK Government acts when the interests of England differ from those of the UK as whole. The first of these issues is an important concern in the area of intergovernmental relations within the UK, but is not the focus of this report. It is the second of these positions that was raised as an issue that needs to be addressed in this report. Professor Denham, for example, set out his concerns in this area, telling us:

there is no national machinery of government of England. Cabinet Ministers will sit in Cabinet, some with English responsibilities, some with English and Welsh, some with Union and, these days, some with British responsibilities but not Union responsibilities, which leads to a position where the central state does not really look at the government of England as a whole, but as a series of disconnected places.⁹⁶

70. Making reference to his own experience as a Minister, Professor Denham explained that he viewed it as unsustainable for a Minister to, at different moments, speak for

94 [Q130](#)

95 See: Richard Rawlings, ‘Wales and the United Kingdom: a territorial constitutional policy drive’, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, (2022); Oral evidence taken on 5 February 2018, HC(2017–19)484, [Q202](#) [First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones]

96 [Q100](#)

the whole of the UK, various parts of the UK, and also England. He argued that the consequence of this situation is that ultimately it is the interests of “England that suffers”.⁹⁷ He illustrated this point by saying:

At no stage in my Cabinet career or as a junior Minister was I ever invited to any meeting that discussed how the Government’s policies as a whole were working for England.⁹⁸

71. Lord Heseltine has also raised the issue of a need to reform Whitehall to better take account of the different needs and interests across England. The first step he has recommended in his report on the subject, entitled *Empowering English Cities*, is to establish a new Department for the English Regions with a powerful Secretary of State. In his view:

This department will involve a significant restructuring of Whitehall equivalent to the creation of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment in 1970. It is necessary to bring under one ministerial control the essential features of the devolution agenda, including planning, local government, housing, transport, skills and the employment agenda.⁹⁹

72. Lord Heseltine reiterated to us that it is necessary to have a Minister who is identified both within Government and by Mayors, as well as by the press, as the driving force behind the devolved agenda and coordinating activity. They would also need to chair a dedicated Cabinet Committee and to have the backing of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He emphasised that:

This Cabinet Committee is going to be extremely important, but without it you will not have the co-ordination that is required. As I say, you then need to co-ordinate that Cabinet’s activities at a local level, so that the individual Departments don’t spew out when it gets down to the conversations locally and there is someone there who is bringing and keeping them all together. It is simply a co-ordination of central Whitehall at a local, immediate level.¹⁰⁰

73. As a consequence of the establishment and subsequent development of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, there is now a legitimate degree of uncertainty about how England fits into the UK’s constitutional arrangements. This is in many ways an odd problem as in practice nothing has changed for England, as it was governed by the UK Government before devolution and it continues to be so. However, the introduction of devolution did fundamentally alter the UK’s constitutional arrangements, and while the effects of this for England have been less immediate, the more the institutions in devolved nations have developed and become an established part of the UK’s constitutional architecture, the more awkward and potentially problematic the position of England becomes.

74. The introduction of the English Votes for English Laws procedure was a recognition of the need to address this problematic situation. As such its removal could be seen as

97 [Q120](#)

98 [Q120](#)

99 *Empowering English Cities*, p 60

100 [Q119](#)

a step backwards. However, as our evidence indicates, it was an ineffectual measure that might not have been sufficient had a significant problem arisen. The Committee supports the Government's removal of the English Votes for English Laws procedure, but laments the symbolism that underlies its abolition.

75. While it may not seem immediately pressing, the question of England's place in the Union is a significant one that cannot be left unanswered indefinitely. While the Secretary of State's approach of ignoring the issues underlying the so-called West Lothian question may be sustainable for the duration of the current Parliament, this is not a long-term solution, and failing to develop concrete proposals in this space displays a distinct lack of willingness to address what may soon become a significant problem. It is not inconceivable that a future General Election might render the question one that cannot be ignored and doing nothing in the meantime solely on the basis of the current parliamentary composition risks being viewed as constitutionally negligent.

76. The Committee also notes the difficulties inherent in UK Ministers also being Ministers for England when discharging their duties. It is entirely conceivable that situations may arise where the interests of England and of the UK will be divergent, and it is not clear to us in such a situation how a Minister would manage this conflict of interests. This situation is not acceptable and places an undue conflict and burden on Ministers in such a situation. *The Government should set out its policy for how a Minister should manage a conflict of interests between their role as a UK Minister and a Minister for England. This should be included in the updated version of the Cabinet Manual and supplied in draft to us in response to this report.*

77. More broadly, while it is clear that the interests of England and the UK are generally likely to be aligned, this may not always be the case, and it is important that proper consideration is given to the interest both of England as a whole and different regions and areas of England.

78. *The question of England's place in the Union cannot continue to be ignored. We recommend that the Government bring forward proposals for how the distinct interests of England can be represented effectively both within the legislative process and within Government and Civil Service structures.*

4 Reforming the Governance of England

79. The preceding chapters have set out some of the most significant issues with the current state of the governance arrangements for England. As we concluded in paragraph 62, these issues demonstrate that there is an urgent and pressing need for significant reform of the governance arrangements of England. This view is supported by the evidence we received to this inquiry, with the responses to the Committee’s question as to whether there should be comprehensive reform of the English devolution and local government system being responded to in the affirmative by a large number of respondents.¹⁰¹ Where there was less consensus was around what any such reforms should be. We received a range of proposals and arguments, from extending the combined authority model to the whole of England, to establishing an English Parliament, to creating a new system of regional governments. We do not attempt to evaluate and recommend a particular pathway for reform in this report. Instead, the focus in this report is on setting out why reform of the governance arrangements for England has proved so difficult in the last 50 years. We found three main reasons that reform of the governance arrangements has proved difficult to achieve in the past. If meaningful reform is to be brought about, it is important that these issues are considered and a way through the quagmire identified:

- The absence of a vision for the future governance of England;
- Different party political approaches; and
- The question of how to sub-divide England.

A lack of vision for England

80. The fact that there are so many differing views on how the governance arrangements for England could be reformed should not come as a surprise, given the history of successive government initiatives and policies in this area. Ayres, Sandford and Finders have described this as being “a landscape of almost permanent administrative reconfiguration and rescaling during the second half of the 20th century” and that, as a result, the evolution of devolution policy for England has shown “the long term absence of any clear constitutional vision.”¹⁰² When we asked Professor Sarah Ayres from the University of Bristol what a long term constitutional vision for the governance of England would look like, she told us:

I think there are two options for the next phase of devolution at the moment. One is more of the same, what my colleagues have described—this mishmash of top-down, technocratic negotiated dealmaking, which might

101 District Councils’ Network ([EDE0021](#)) Mr Stephen Vivian-Davis (Chairman at Campaign for an English Parliament) ([EDE0023](#)) Campaign for an English Parliament ([EDE0025](#)) Professor John Denham (Director, Centre for English Identity and Politics at University of Southampton) ([EDE0026](#)) Dr Keith Tapp ([EDE0028](#)) Core Cities UK ([EDE0030](#)) Britain’s Leading Edge ([EDE0033](#)) Electoral Reform Society ([EDE0034](#)) Cornwall Council ([EDE0035](#)) Buckinghamshire Growth Board ([EDE0038](#)) Anthony Sutcliffe ([EDE0042](#)) Centre for Governance and Scrutiny ([EDE0044](#)) South East England Councils ([EDE0046](#)) Surrey County Council ([EDE0015](#)) Junade Ali ([EDE0005](#)) Roland Dunster ([EDE0006](#)) Tom Barrett ([EDE0007](#)) DevoConnect ([EDE0009](#)) Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS), Newcastle University ([EDE0010](#)) Local Government Association ([EDE0012](#)) Alistair Jones (Associate Professor and University Teacher Fellow at De Montfort University) ([EDE0013](#)) Emeritus Professor Colin Copus (Professor at De Montfort University, Leicester) ([EDE0014](#))

102 Sarah Ayres, Matthew Flinders & Mark Sandford, ‘Territory, power and statecraft: understanding English devolution’, *Regional Studies*, 52:6, 2018, 853–864

be recognisable for those core élites charged with managing the process: it is an economic productivity agenda. Or there is a different vision—something perhaps a little more radical, something that offers genuine power and control for local people, those people that are affected by decisions...

...we are so engrained in the British political tradition of top-down control that it is difficult for us to see beyond that to see what genuine devolution in England could look like, but there is a question whether, post-Brexit, post-Covid, the time is right now for something a little more radical and imaginative.¹⁰³

81. Dr Giovannini also told us that the governance arrangements and devolution to England in particular “lacks a clear framework and direction of travel”.¹⁰⁴ She argued that a “profound rethinking of the way centre-local relations work” as well as “a cultural shift at the centre” was needed. For her, the principle of subsidiarity¹⁰⁵ needs to be at core of a long-term constitutional vision for England and for the UK as a whole.¹⁰⁶

82. Professor Ayres echoed this view, stating that “the narrative, the vision, has not been spelt out. It is hard to buy into a vision that has never been articulated effectively”. She went on to say that, in her view, “[i]f you get the geography right, if you get the vision right, and there is an offer of the possibility of doing something different, the public will respond”.¹⁰⁷

Divergent political views of England

83. The second main obstacle to meaningful and lasting reform of the governance arrangements for England raised in evidence we received was that the two main UK political parties have held divergent views about the issue, with their positions changing again and again over time. As Professor Kenny explained, on the one hand, the Conservative Party has generally “been much more comfortable with the idea that English identity is valuable and important to people and that England itself may be some kind of collective community, which may have its own interests as well as identity.” On the other hand, the Labour Party has been “more primed to thinking in regional terms and tends to think that claims about Englishness are either illusory or reactionary”. The consequence of this, in Professor Kenny’s view, is that:

when the different parties get in government, there is a default to these two different perspectives and those perspectives lead you to think about the intermediate layer, or indeed to think about devolution at the level of England in different ways. Until there is some richer interchange between them where people start to think about devolution at the level of England and also think about some of the layers within it that we have been discussing, we are going to have ping-ponging between these two different views.¹⁰⁸

103 [Q3](#)

104 [Q2](#)

105 Subsidiarity in this context is defined as the principle that within a political system powers should be exercised and decisions be made at the most local level, higher levels and ultimately central government should only exercise those powers that cannot be effectively exercised at the lower levels

106 [Q4](#)

107 [Q13](#)

108 [Q31](#)

84. Setting out the traditional party-political positions and the importance of a new approach, Professor Denham told us:

As people look at the state of the Union, you cannot any longer say it is not just about Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is about how England is governed, and I think that both parties need a fresh look. Traditionally, the Conservative party is a Unionist party. England tended to regard the Union as the expression of England's extended interests. It was never terribly interested in how England was governed. Labour regarded itself as the party of the industrial and mining areas of the country, which tended to mean it saw itself as being Welsh, Scottish, industrial England, but was rather suspicious of England as a bit too conservative. I think that led the Conservatives to be a bit neglectful about England. Labour's preference for regionalism was always about stopping England having a voice of its own, which it always worried would be too conservative. I think in a sense both of those political traditions have run their course if we want to sort the Union out and keep a Union, which is what I want to do.¹⁰⁹

85. Both Professor Denham and Lord Heseltine pointed to the creation of combined authority mayors as helping to change the dynamics, with much more similar views about England for example being expressed by Andy Burnham, the Labour Mayor for the Great Manchester Combined Authority, and Andy Street, the Conservative Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority.¹¹⁰

86. Lord Heseltine also highlighted to us that the party-political blocks to reform of English governance arrangements have come not only between parties, but also within them. Recounting his experience of trying to introduce unitary counties throughout the UK in the 1990s, he told us that he did not have a majority in the House of Commons that would support their introduction in England due to the opposition of Conservative Councillors. But he told us where there were no Conservative Councillors in Scotland and in Wales, they were able to introduce them without a great debate, and in a manner which is now considered to be settled. He added that “[n]obody in Scotland and Wales wants to bring back the districts.”¹¹¹

87. Addressing the issue of the problems caused by the lack of shared vision between the Conservative and Labour parties of the potential avenues to reform the governance arrangements for England, Professor Wyn Jones told us that a Royal Commission might be the only route to establish consensus:

You have also had this problem, going back over the last 20 to 25 years, where because there has been no shared vision between the two largest parties in England, we have had things being set up, removed, new things put in their place, removed. There is a constant churn in this area, and so I think that while traditionally there is a view of royal commissions as being a way of kicking things into the long grass and not dealing with issues,

109 [Q110](#)

110 [Q110](#)

111 [Q103](#)

when you have a fundamental lack of consensus between the two largest parties in England there is an argument for some mechanism, I think, where discussions take place.¹¹²

Boundaries within England

88. Another of the historical impediments to reform of the governance arrangements for England that became apparent in the course of our inquiry is lack of agreement about how England should be divided up, where the boundaries in England are, and where they should be. This has been seen both in debates over the unitisation of English local authorities, and over what the administrative units would be if an intermediate tier of devolved government were introduced. The central issue that surrounds these questions is what criteria should be used to ‘divide up’ England; options include recognised local or cultural identities; economic areas; or geographical criteria.

89. In 1969, the Radcliffe-Maud Commission put forward its recommendation for a unitised system based on functional economic geographies, which was ultimately rejected in favour of the two-tier system by the Heath Government elected in 1970. As Lord Heseltine explained to us, he tried to introduce a unitised county system in the 1990s and again met with opposition from areas that did not want to lose their existing structures.¹¹³ Since this point, however, there has been a gradual move towards more unitised authorities.¹¹⁴ Despite this, there is opposition to unitary authorities. The District Council Network, for example, in their written evidence to our inquiry, called on “the government and others to reject the false arguments from those wanting county unitary councils everywhere”.¹¹⁵ They further set out their argument, saying:

[T]here are few (if any) genuinely well-evidenced arguments for reorganisation into larger county unitary councils at any time. All the genuinely independent evidence (rather than paid for consultancy reports) is conclusive that bigger local government is not better or more efficient, and that it is less responsive and democratic. The public agree, consistently voting against the creation of large new councils whenever asked.¹¹⁶

90. When it comes to devolution in the UK, it has only ever been to clear and established administrative units. This was the case for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and, to certain extent, London. However, as Professor Wyn Jones told us, outside of London “there is a lack of basic agreement on even the boundaries of a regional level or an intermediate level in England, let alone what the functions of that level might be”.¹¹⁷ He went on to further explain that:

There may well be very strong arguments for a regional or an intermediate level of governance in England, but I am afraid public attitudes isn’t the trump card if you want to win that argument, in my view.¹¹⁸

112 [Q5](#)

113 [Q103–4](#)

114 See: Mark Sandford, [Local government in England: structures](#), House of Common Library Briefing Number 07104, 13 June 2022

115 District Councils’ Network ([EDE0021](#))

116 District Councils’ Network ([EDE0021](#))

117 [Q5](#)

118 [Q8](#)

91. Reflecting on this point, Professor Kenny said that one of the issues when thinking about bureaucratically drawing lines of division of England is what makes sense at a functional level and fits with people's sense of geographies that matter to them. He noted that "[t]here are traditions—geographically bounded forms of identity, be it counties, be it cities, be it villages or towns—which run very deeply in England."¹¹⁹ When these functional, and geographically-bounded identities do not align, it is more likely to come up against opposition. However, while recognising the deep problems of developing geographies for devolved government in England, Professor Kenny put the argument to us that:

In terms of the question about how the English want to be governed, I share the lack of certainty in an answer. The point is that the English have never been asked in this way. That is such an important temporal point. Devolution was offered in a completely different way to other parts of the UK and was of course introduced with referendums. The question of whether the English want to have a greater say in determining their own destiny, either within their local areas or as a nation as a whole, has just not been posed in that way. It is very important that we have not had that sustained debate about it. We have not had it in politics. We have not had it at a popular level.¹²⁰

92. Adding to this, Professor Wyn Jones pointed to the growth in popularity for devolution in Wales after only narrowly getting a majority for devolution in 1997. He also pointed to the established of the Bundesländer (Federal States) comprising the Federal Republic of Germany, which he said "were quite unpopular when they were introduced and now they are not".¹²¹ Dr Giovannini also raised the example of the Bundesländer telling us:

We should ask ourselves why the support for the Länder has grown over time in Germany. This also leads to reflection on the question of scale. When the Länder were created in Germany they were a mix of historical ones and completely artificial ones and that mapped on to a system of local government that is empowered and not disempowered. But the mechanism of federalism that emerged in Germany is a co-operative one with less collaboration across and between all levels, and all levels are empowered. I think that is what made a difference. That is why people bought into that system of decentralisation, because whether they were based on artificial or historical units, over time people bought into it because there were real powers attached to it, so people could see the difference the system could make in their everyday life.¹²²

93. The idea of developing a system in England based on the Bundesländer also drew support from Alderman Roy Perry, although others such as Councillor Martin Tett felt

119 [Q12](#)

120 [Q42](#)

121 [Q50](#)

122 [Q51](#)

that the size of the Bundesländer were too big for England,¹²³ and Councillor John Fuller felt looking at the next level down of sub-regions in the German system would be a more useful model to look to.¹²⁴

94. The task of reforming the governance arrangements for England is not an easy one. There are strong historical, cultural, geographic and economic reasons to pursuing a range of different approaches. We have identified three main reasons why meaningful and sustained reform has not occurred over the last 50 years.

95. If any reform is to take place it must address all of these issues, otherwise it is likely only to be another short term and partial measure. For a reform of the governance systems to successfully be implemented and invested in, a vision of where England will end up needs to be clearly articulated, on a cross-party basis and at all levels, to get sufficient political acceptance from the people necessary for its implementation to guarantee long-term delivery.

123 For instance, out of 16 Bundesländer, Bavaria is approximately 20% of the area of the Federal Republic of Germany, while North Rhine-Westphalia has approximately 22% of the entire German population within its borders.

124 [Q45](#)

5 The Levelling Up White Paper

96. The Government published its proposals for further English ‘devolution’ and local government reform as part of the Levelling Up White Paper on 2nd February 2022. In his forward, the then Prime Minister said that “the defining mission of this government has been to level up this country”. He went on to say that the White Paper will “set out the practical steps... that will make this a better, fairer country for us all”, “usher in a revolution in local democracy” and “[i]ntroduce a whole new way of thinking in central government, recognising that national success alone is not enough if it masks local failings”. He called the White Paper “[t]he most comprehensive, ambitious plan of its kind that this country has ever seen.”¹²⁵ In his foreword, the Secretary of State says that, as part of the White Paper proposals:

[W]e are rewiring Whitehall to put place at the heart of decision making, including by moving more civil servants outside London. It also requires a further devolution of decision-making powers to local leaders where decisions are often best taken. A new devolution framework provides a roadmap for doing so.¹²⁶

97. These are bold statements that suggest a serious vision for how the governance arrangements for England and the UK might be reformed. This final chapter will consider the proposals contained in the White Paper in light of the findings set out in the first four chapters of this report.

The White Paper proposals

98. The White Paper sets out Five pillars of its new policy regime:

- (1) setting clear and ambitious medium-term missions
- (2) central government decision-making will be fundamentally reoriented
- (3) the UK Government will empower decision-makers in local areas
- (4) the UK Government will transform its approach to data and evaluation
- (5) the UK Government will create a new regime to oversee its levelling up missions

99. Under the first of these pillars, the White Paper sets out 12 missions across four broad policy objectives to be achieved by 2030 including:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
 - Living standards - pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK
 - R&D–By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK

125 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p viii-ix

126 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p x

- Transport infrastructure—local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London.
- Digital connectivity—the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
 - Pride in Place - people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK.
 - Housing - renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas.
 - Crime - homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst affected area.
 - Well-being - well-being will have improved in every area of the UK.
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.
 - Local Leadership - By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.¹²⁷

100. The key mission that concerns reforms to the governance arrangements for England is the last mission statement, namely that “every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement”. In order to address this mission, the White Paper sets out “a new devolution framework for England”.¹²⁸ The devolution framework the White Paper sets out is, in its words:

designed to create a clear and consistent set of devolution pathways for places, enabling them to widen and deepen their devolved powers subject to meeting certain pre-conditions. The preferred model of devolution is one with a directly-elected leader covering a well defined economic geography with a clear and direct mandate, strong accountability and the convening power to make change happen. However, because this may not suit all areas, the framework sets out a flexible, tiered approach, allowing areas to deepen devolution at their own pace.

101. Underpinning the framework are four principles:

- (1) Effective leadership - The White Paper sets out that strong local leadership is essential for delivering better local outcomes and joined-up public services. It says power should be “devolved” to authorities that have the necessary structure and leadership for clear strong local decision making. The White Paper expresses

127 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p XiX

128 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), P136

a preference for a single, directly elected leader. However, it remains open to the possibility for areas to apply for deals without a directly elected leader, as long as there is a clear decision-making structure.

- (2) **Sensible Geography** - Currently, devolution deals have typically been based on a city geography's covering a functional economic area (FEA). The White Paper says that it is important that new devolution deals are based on geographies that are locally recognisable in terms of identity, place and community, as well as being sensible economic areas that join up where people live and work. The White Paper says that to access more powers, any future devolution deals should be agreed over a sensible FEA. The White Paper makes clear that, in order to ensure decisions are taken over strategic geography for any tier of devolution, the council or group of councils seeking devolution must have a combined population of at least 500,000.
- (3) **Flexibility** - Devolution deals will be tailored to each area with not every area necessarily having the same powers. Three levels are set out that areas can apply for: Level 1 where there is informal joint working between authorities; Level 2 when authorities form a single institution without an elected mayoralty; and Level 3 when authorities form a single institution with a directly-elected mayoralty. The purpose the White Paper sets out is that areas can move up through these levels, deepening devolution over time, recognising that, as institutions mature, they can gain additional powers.
- (4) **Appropriate Accountability** - The White Paper sets out that in providing areas with more powers and funding flexibility, these powers will need to be used appropriately to support local and national priorities. The White Paper says that, in order to achieve this, mechanisms are needed to strengthen local accountability, and that these measures for devolution deals will be set within a broader Local Government Accountability framework. This framework will ensure that there are clear roles and metrics for assessment and measures to support local areas, alongside strong local scrutiny mechanisms. This will enable local people to have confidence that devolution is leading to improvement in their area.¹²⁹

102. The White Paper also raises the issue of central government policy being set without a full understanding of the local context. The establishment of the new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities was intended to signal a fundamental shift in the UK Government's approach to policy in this space, taking account of previous criticisms regarding the centre's lack of understanding of the local level.¹³⁰

Evaluation of the White Paper proposals

103. Chapter 2 of this report set out a number of concerns with the current governance arrangements for England. If the proposals contained in the White Paper are to make a real impact, they must be able to effectively address each of these concerns:

129 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p136–40

130 DLUHC, [Levelling Up](#), p124

- **The complexity of the current governance structures in England.** The proposals for reform in the White Paper are internally consistent, clear and well-structured. By themselves, they make logical sense and the White Paper provides a useful guide to the new structures proposed. However, these proposals are not being applied to a blank canvas, they are being imposed on top of the existing complexity that we identified earlier in this report. Further, while the Government can be commended for trying to produce a system into which different areas and authorities can move into and up at their own pace, the consequence of this is that it will add significant complexity to an already complex system for most citizens, and implies increasing complexity over time, rather than simplicity.
- **The opaque nature of the governance arrangements.** The greater complexity is likely to only add to the opaque nature for many people. Again, the Government has tried to create accountability mechanisms, which may provide some internal checks that are effective, however it remains unclear the extent to which citizens will effectively access these mechanisms. Ultimately, by adding to the governance structures rather than consolidating and simplifying them, these arrangements are likely to become increasingly confusing and opaque.
- **The centralised nature of the governance of England.** The White Paper makes numerous very encouraging statements to show that the Government recognises that the overcentralisation of power and decision-making in Whitehall is problematic. It is less clear what the actual changes proposed in the White Paper do to address the significant overcentralisation we identified in our evidence, which the White Paper itself also alludes to. The Government’s proposal to continue with the ‘deal making’ model, despite containing a clearer framework for powers that can be decentralised, ultimately leaves the significant decision-making power in Whitehall, not town halls. Further, because of this, the proposals do little to nothing to address the current accountability deficit as the UK Parliament remains the only body able to hold the UK Government to account.
- **Ineffective funding arrangements.** The White Paper commits to new, simplified, long-term funding structures. We also welcome the commitment to reduce the number of competitive funding pots and removing “restrictive ringfences”.¹³¹ We await more detailed plans for “streamlining the funding landscape”, but we encourage the Government to provide funding that can be utilised more at the discretion of local government and combined authorities, rather than for centrally mandated projects, issues or areas.
- **Geographical inequality.** As the primary focus of the White Paper, this area appears to be well addressed throughout. We note only that the policies in the White Paper should be kept under review with regards to the coastal and rural towns which we heard had previously been left behind in terms of central government attention and planning.
- **Low political efficacy in England.** People in England have a tendency to feel that their voice does not matter. While the rhetoric of ‘levelling up’ in the White

Paper is positive, there is little direct evidence of concrete proposals to address this issue, with no key metrics in place to assess how the changes being brought about as part of this agenda are improving the political system in such a way as to convince people in England that their voice matters.

The UK Government's understanding of devolution

104. We raised the issue of the appropriate use of the term 'devolution' in the UK constitutional lexicon at the beginning of this report. The White Paper used the term devolution liberally and in our view in a manner and to an extent that is unhelpful in clearly setting out the changes envisaged in the levelling up agenda. This was clearly demonstrated when we questioned the Secretary of State on the fact that the White Paper, which makes frequent references to the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, commits to giving parts of England the 'highest level of devolution' and whether this meant that the White Paper envisaged legislative and executive devolution on the same scale as the devolved administrations, who told us:

No. By the highest levels of devolution, and this is a drafting error for which I take full responsibility, I mean the highest existing levels of devolution within England¹³²

105. When asked whether the crux of the Levelling Up White Paper in this space was more akin to local government reform or to devolution, the Secretary of State told us that, in his view, "they are not totally different ... devolution has meant different things at different times. Whether you call it local government reform, decentralisation or devolution, they are a continuum".¹³³ While we accept that the plain use of the word devolution can be used somewhat interchangeably with decentralisation, in the context of UK political and constitutional arrangements, we suggest that the Government would be better off retaining the term 'devolution' for the kind of transfer of powers that has been seen to the devolved nations' institutions, and using the language of decentralisation for rebalancing of powers between central and local government without wholesale structural reform along the lines of the devolution settlements themselves.

106. The Government should be commended for its willingness to openly identify many of the issues that we have also found with the current governance arrangements for England through the course of our inquiry. The publication of the White Paper has undoubtedly helped push the more fundamental questions of the governance arrangements of England and England's place in the Union up the political agenda.

107. There are no easy answers to the question as to what model(s) of reform to the governance arrangements for England would be successful or would satisfactorily address all the issues that we touched on during our inquiry, given the range of views. While there is unanimous agreement on this Committee that real, meaningful, and urgent changes need to be made, there is a range of different views about what these changes could or should be. The crucial point is that we recognise that the need for reform now outweighs the need for any particular approach to be adopted. Successive Government have tinkered on the edges of these questions and problems, and unfortunately we feel the Levelling Up White Paper is destined to continue that

132 [Q104](#)

133 [Q121](#)

pattern. What is needed is a different approach that commits to meaningful, long-term reform that seriously addresses the questions and problems we have set out, but also removes the issue from the mainstream party-political arena in order to arrive at a sustainable solution acceptable to all. As such we are taking the unusual step of making the following recommendation not only to the Government, but also to the Opposition and other parties in House of Commons.

108. The Government should bring forward, and opposition parties should support, a Bill to establish a cross-party Commission on the governance of England. This Commission should be funded through and responsible to Parliament. The remit of the Commission should be to draw up proposals for reforms to the governance arrangements for England and for addressing the questions of England's place in the Union. The Commission should also draft legislation to implement these proposals, to be presented to both Houses for approval. It is imperative that this Commission has the support of all major parties, regardless of future General Election results, as given the significance of these reforms is it likely that the Commission may undertake its work over the course of one or more Parliaments. The Government should take the steps to begin the establishment of such a Commission before the end of this Parliament.

Conclusions and recommendations

The current state of the governance of England

1. The Committee has significant concerns about current governance arrangements for England. The evidence we received suggests that even those working within the different parts of local government are not always clear on how the system works, where decisions are made, where accountability lies, and consequently how polices and services can be adapted to the needs of local areas and local people. If the people within government are unsure at times where powers and responsibility, and hence accountability, rest, this lack of clarity is magnified for individuals who have little knowledge or experience of the structures. This has the potential to leave individuals less likely to be able to access what they need from government, leaving them often unable to know who is responsible, and as a result are not properly able to hold their democratic representatives to account. (Paragraph 30)
2. The evidence is clear both practically and democratically that the overly centralised arrangements of government in England are problematic. We were convinced by the evidence presented to us that the current balance of decisions is weighted too much to the centre and that this leads to suboptimal decision-making and policies, with corresponding challenges for delivery. It was suggested to us that the predominant reason for the over-centralisation of power is due to the culture in Whitehall that is unwilling to let go of powers. There is also concern about what was described as the ‘silo culture’ of Whitehall departments. While this may have benefits in Whitehall for developing national policies for the whole of England or the UK, it is clear that when these policies are implemented locally there is a risk that they will not connect and so local areas and people may have a range of different, disjointed experiences. Local government is not simply a delivery arm for Whitehall, and should not be treated thus. There is a clear role for local government to help bring together national policies and adapt them for implementation in local areas. In order for this to happen, there will need to be a culture shift in central government, to view local government as partners. It is important that this rebalancing of power take place urgently, for as it currently stands, central government wields too much power, and the UK Parliament is not set up to scrutinise this use of power either effectively or appropriately. Taken together, all of these factors may lead to poorer outcomes for individuals across England, which cannot be tolerated. (Paragraph 39)
3. It is clear from our evidence that the current funding structures for local government and combined authorities reflects the instinct in Whitehall to maintain control of the levers of power and the purse strings. It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to make detailed recommendations on reforms to the funding structures for local government and combined authorities, however, it is clear to us that reforms are needed. *In response to this report, the Government should make a clear commitment to put an end to the ubiquitous system of bidding for pots of money that appear to us to be wasteful of resources that could be deployed more effectively at all levels. In addition, the Government should provide the Committee with the information that the Secretary of State committed to provide to us in March of this year.* (Paragraph 47)

4. It is widely recognised that there is considerable geographical inequity within the governance arrangements of England. This is the area that the Government have clearly identified and prioritised in producing the Levelling Up White Paper. We note, however, the concerns raised in our evidence that until now the Government's approach to "devolution" in England has focused on metropolitan areas, or areas in which there is a major city. Careful thought needs to be given to how the coastal and rural areas of England can be given equal opportunities to develop and grow. (Paragraph 52)
5. Successive Governments, far from putting in place careful reforms to nurture and develop decentralised and durable governance structures for England, have adopted a piecemeal and uncoordinated approach. This is simply not good enough. (Paragraph 60)
6. The long-term viability of governance arrangements in England is a significant and pressing problem that has been neglected by successive governments for too long. It is clear that those in local government want a system that enables them to deliver for people and businesses in their area. However, the reality is that the governance arrangements for England are simply too complex, and too much is controlled from the centre. We heard that people in England have particularly low political efficacy, meaning they simply do not think that their voice will be heard or matters. This is a serious warning sign for the health of democracy in the United Kingdom. (Paragraph 61)
7. *There is an urgent and pressing need for significant reform of the governance arrangements of England, so that they not only work effectively, but can be seen to work effectively, in order to strengthen and restore the public trust in the functioning of our democracy at all levels.* (Paragraph 62)

England in the UK Parliament and Government

8. As a consequence of the establishment and subsequent development of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, there is now a legitimate degree of uncertainty about how England fits into the UK's constitutional arrangements. This is in many ways an odd problem as in practice nothing has changed for England, as it was governed by the UK Government before devolution and it continues to be so. However, the introduction of devolution did fundamentally alter the UK's constitutional arrangements, and while the effects of this for England have been less immediate, the more the institutions in devolved nations have developed and become an established part of the UK's constitutional architecture, the more awkward and potentially problematic the position of England becomes. (Paragraph 73)
9. The introduction of the English Votes for English Laws procedure was a recognition of the need to address this problematic situation. As such its removal could be seen as a step backwards. However, as our evidence indicates, it was an ineffectual measure that might not have been sufficient had a significant problem arisen. The Committee supports the Government's removal of the English Votes for English Laws procedure, but laments the symbolism that underlies its abolition. (Paragraph 74)

10. While it may not seem immediately pressing, the question of England's place in the Union is a significant one that cannot be left unanswered indefinitely. While the Secretary of State's approach of ignoring the issues underlying the so-called West Lothian question may be sustainable for the duration of the current Parliament, this is not a long-term solution, and failing to develop concrete proposals in this space displays a distinct lack of willingness to address what may soon become a significant problem. It is not inconceivable that a future General Election might render the question one that cannot be ignored and doing nothing in the meantime solely on the basis of the current parliamentary composition risks being viewed as constitutionally negligent. (Paragraph 75)
11. The Committee also notes the difficulties inherent in UK Ministers also being Ministers for England when discharging their duties. It is entirely conceivable that situations may arise where the interests of England and of the UK will be divergent, and it is not clear to us in such a situation how a Minister would manage this conflict of interests. This situation is not acceptable and places an undue conflict and burden on Ministers in such a situation. *The Government should set out its policy for how a Minister should manage a conflict of interests between their role as a UK Minister and a Minister for England. This should be included in the updated version of the Cabinet Manual and supplied in draft to us in response to this report.* (Paragraph 76)
12. More broadly, while it is clear that the interests of England and the UK are generally likely to be aligned, this may not always be the case, and it is important that proper consideration is given to the interest both of England as a whole and different regions and areas of England. (Paragraph 77)
13. *The question of England's place in the Union cannot continue to be ignored. We recommend that the Government bring forward proposals for how the distinct interests of England can be represented effectively both within the legislative process and within Government and Civil Service structures.* (Paragraph 78)

Reforming the Governance of England

14. The task of reforming the governance arrangements for England is not an easy one. There are strong historical, cultural, geographic and economic reasons to pursuing a range of different approaches. We have identified three main reasons why meaningful and sustained reform has not occurred over the last 50 years. (Paragraph 94)
15. *If any reform is to take place it must address all of these issues, otherwise it is likely only to be another short term and partial measure. For a reform of the governance systems to successfully be implemented and invested in, a vision of where England will end up needs to be clearly articulated, on a cross-party basis and at all levels, to get sufficient political acceptance from the people necessary for its implementation to guarantee long-term delivery.* (Paragraph 95)

The Levelling Up White Paper

16. The Government should be commended for its willingness to openly identify many of the issues that we have also found with the current governance arrangements for England through the course of our inquiry. The publication of the White Paper

has undoubtedly helped push the more fundamental questions of the governance arrangements of England and England's place in the Union up the political agenda. (Paragraph 106)

17. There are no easy answers to the question as to what model(s) of reform to the governance arrangements for England would be successful or would satisfactorily address all the issues that we touched on during our inquiry, given the range of views. While there is unanimous agreement on this Committee that real, meaningful, and urgent changes need to be made, there is a range of different views about what these changes could or should be. The crucial point is that we recognise that the need for reform now outweighs the need for any particular approach to be adopted. Successive Government have tinkered on the edges of these questions and problems, and unfortunately we feel the Levelling Up White Paper is destined to continue that pattern. What is needed is a different approach that commits to meaningful, long-term reform that seriously addresses the questions and problems we have set out, but also removes the issue from the mainstream party-political arena in order to arrive at a sustainable solution acceptable to all. As such we are taking the unusual step of making the following recommendation not only to the Government, but also to the Opposition and other parties in House of Commons. (Paragraph 107)
18. *The Government should bring forward, and opposition parties should support, a Bill to establish a cross-party Commission on the governance of England. This Commission should be funded through and responsible to Parliament. The remit of the Commission should be to draw up proposals for reforms to the governance arrangements for England and for addressing the questions of England's place in the Union. The Commission should also draft legislation to implement these proposals, to be presented to both Houses for approval. It is imperative that this Commission has the support of all major parties, regardless of future General Election results, as given the significance of these reforms is it likely that the Commission may undertake its work over the course of one or more Parliaments. The Government should take the steps to begin the establishment of such a Commission before the end of this Parliament.* (Paragraph 108)

Formal minutes

Thursday 13 October 2022

Members present:

Mr William Wragg, in the Chair

Mr David Jones

John McDonnell

Tom Randall

Lloyd Russell-Moyle

Karin Smyth

Draft Report (*Governing England*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 108 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

Adjournment

[Adjourned till Tuesday 18 October 2022 at 09.30am]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 20 October 2020

Professor Michael Kenny, Professor of Politics, University of Cambridge & Director of Bennett Institute for Public Policy; **Dr Arianna Giovannini**, Associate Professor in Local Politics & Public Policy, De Montfort University; **Professor Sarah Ayres**, Professor of Public Policy and Governance, University of Bristol; **Professor Richard Wyn Jones**, Director of Wales Governance and Dean of Public Affairs, Cardiff University

[Q1–61](#)

Tuesday 2 February 2021

Councillor Sir Richard Leese, Chair of the Local Government Association's City Regions Board and Leader of Manchester City Council, **Councillor David Williams**, County Councils Network Chairman and Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, and **Councillor Julian German**, Britain's Leading Edge and Leader of Cornwall Council

[Q62–98](#)

The Rt Hon. Lord Heseltine CH, and **Professor John Denham**, Director, Centre for English Identity and Politics, University of Southampton

[Q99–124](#)

Tuesday 6 July 2021

Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor, Greater Manchester Combined Authority; and **Jamie Driscoll**, Mayor, North of Tyne Combined Authority

[Q1–32](#)

Alderman Roy Perry, Chair, South East Councils, and former Leader, Hampshire County Council; **Councillor John Fuller OBE**, Chair, District Councils' Network; and **Councillor Martin Tett**, Leader, Buckinghamshire Council

[Q33–50](#)

Tuesday 15 July 2021

Ben Houchen, Mayor of Tees Valley Combined Authority; and **Tracy Brabin**, Mayor of West Yorkshire Combined Authority

[Q41–86](#)

Thursday 1 March 2022

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

[Q1–138](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

EDE numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Ali, Junade ([EDE0005](#))
- 2 Ayres, Professor Sarah (Professor of Public Policy and Governance, University of Bristol) ([EDE0027](#))
- 3 Barrett, Tom ([EDE0007](#))
- 4 Bennett Institute for Public Policy ([EDE0011](#))
- 5 Britain's Leading Edge ([EDE0033](#))
- 6 Buckinghamshire Growth Board ([EDE0038](#))
- 7 Burton, Mr Nick (Company Director, Self) ([EDE0040](#))
- 8 Campaign for an English Parliament ([EDE0025](#))
- 9 Centre for Britain and Europe ([EDE0019](#))
- 10 Centre for Governance and Scrutiny ([EDE0044](#))
- 11 Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS), Newcastle University ([EDE0010](#))
- 12 Cooper, Dr Luke (Consultant researcher, LSE IDEAS) ([EDE0037](#))
- 13 Copus, Emeritus Professor Colin (Professor, De Montfort University, Leicester) ([EDE0014](#))
- 14 Core Cities UK ([EDE0030](#))
- 15 Cornwall Council ([EDE0035](#))
- 16 Councils, South East England ([EDE0046](#))
- 17 County Councils Network ([EDE0036](#))
- 18 Denham, Professor John (Director, Centre for English Identity and Politics, University of Southampton) ([EDE0026](#))
- 19 DevoConnect ([EDE0009](#))
- 20 District Councils' Network ([EDE0021](#))
- 21 Dunster, Roland ([EDE0006](#))
- 22 Electoral Reform Society ([EDE0034](#))
- 23 Gover, Dr Daniel (Lecturer in British Politics, Queen Mary University of London); and Kenny, Professor Michael (Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge) ([EDE0018](#))
- 24 GuildHE ([EDE0016](#))
- 25 Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice & Place ([EDE0029](#))
- 26 Jones, Alistair (Associate Professor and University Teacher Fellow, De Montfort University) ([EDE0013](#))
- 27 Local Government Association ([EDE0012](#))
- 28 Mawby, Rachel (Policy and Stakeholder Relations Manager, LGSCO) ([EDE0022](#))
- 29 National Association of Local Councils ([EDE0045](#))

- 30 Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([EDE0039](#))
- 31 Richards, Professor David (Diamond Professor of Public Policy, University of Manchester); Coyle, Professor Diane (Bennett Professor of Public Policy, University of Cambridge); Smith, Professor Martin (Anniversary Professor of Politics, University of York); and Warner, Dr Sam (Research Associate, University of Manchester) ([EDE0017](#))
- 32 Shapely, Professor Peter (Head of the School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences, Bangor University) ([EDE0003](#))
- 33 Surrey County Council ([EDE0015](#))
- 34 Sutcliffe, Anthony ([EDE0042](#))
- 35 Tapp, Dr Keith ([EDE0028](#))
- 36 Taylor, Christine ([EDE0047](#))
- 37 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([EDE0024](#))
- 38 UNISON ([EDE0008](#))
- 39 Vivian-Davis, Mr Stephen (Chairman , Campaign for an English Parliament) ([EDE0023](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2020–21	HC 213
2nd	The Work of the Electoral Commission	HC 462
1st Special	Coronavirus Act 2020 Two Years On: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2021–22	HC 211
2nd Special	The Cabinet Office Freedom of Information Clearing House: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 576
3rd Special	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2020–21: PHSO and Government responses to the Committee's First Report	HC 616

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	The role and status of the Prime Minister's Office	HC 67
2nd	Covid-Status Certification	HC 42
3rd	Propriety of Governance in Light of Greensill: An Interim Report	HC 59
4th	Appointment of William Shawcross as Commissioner for Public Appointments	HC 662
5th	The Elections Bill	HC 597
6th	The appointment of Rt Hon the Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston as First Civil Service Commissioner	HC 984
7th	Coronavirus Act 2020 Two Years On	HC 978
8th	The appointment of Sir Robert Chote as Chair of the UK Statistics Authority	HC 1162
9th	The Cabinet Office Freedom of Information Clearing House	HC 505
1st Special	Government transparency and accountability during Covid 19: The data underpinning decisions: Government's response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 234
2nd Special	Covid-Status Certification: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 670

Number	Title	Reference
3rd Special	The role and status of the Prime Minister's Office: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 710
4th Special	The Elections Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1133

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Appointment of Rt Hon Lord Pickles as Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments	HC 168
2nd	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2018–19	HC 117
3rd	Delivering the Government's infrastructure commitments through major projects	HC 125
4th	Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Government's handling of Covid-19	HC 377
5th	A Public Inquiry into the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic	HC 541
6th	The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011	HC 167
7th	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2019–20	HC 843
8th	Government transparency and accountability during Covid 19: The data underpinning decisions	HC 803
1st Special	Electoral law: The Urgent Need for Review: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 327
2nd Special	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2018–19: Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's response to the Committee's Second report	HC 822
3rd Special	Delivering the Government's infrastructure commitments through major projects: Government Response to the Committee's Third report	HC 853
4th Special	A Public Inquiry into the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic: Government's response to the Committee's Fifth report	HC 995
5th Special	Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Government's handling of Covid-19: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1078
6th Special	The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011: Government's response to the Committee's Sixth report of Session 2019–21	HC 1082
7th Special	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2019–20: Government's and PHSO response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1348